

7.25.08: Lt. Governor Garamendi Demands Tougher, Cohesive State laws to clean-up CA beaches

Lt. Governor John Garamendi Demands Tougher, Cohesive State Laws to Clean-Up and Protect California's Beaches, Marine Life and Ocean from Trash SAN DIEGO — Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi today said a major Marine Debris report to be released by the Ocean Protection Council is on the right track to toughen state laws to clean-up California's seas and beaches but it must be done in a unified, upgraded way to work with cities and counties going green by banning and restricting polluting debris.

"It is time to take the issue of cleaning up our beaches and ocean to a higher level by making sure state laws are passed in a cohesive way to get the job done. Right now the state laws are interfering with cities and counties. We must work together to move forward," Lieutenant John Garamendi said. "I'm committed to working with the all branches of the government and concerned citizens to transform the report's recommendations into reality. I firmly believe we must protect our oceans for our health, for the benefit of future generations, and for our economy," said Garamendi.

Garamendi, a former deputy Interior Secretary in the Clinton Administration, asked for the Marine Debris report as chairman of the state Lands Commission and member of the Ocean Protection Council. The report, scheduled for release today, delayed due to budget negotiations.

Earlier, Garamendi worked with environmental organizations and other advocacy groups to form the The Pacific Protection Initiative, a flotilla of California state legislation aimed at addressing marine debris. He was joined by Assemblymember Lori Saldana (D-San Diego) and leading environmental groups.

"We are pleased with the leadership role the Lieutenant Governor and the Ocean Protection Council have taken on Marine Debris pollution and we hope this report helps convince legislators and the Governor that this is something that needs to move forward sooner than later," Bryan Early, Plastic Waste Reduction Campaign coordinator.

Marine Debris Problems and Solutions in California: Ø It is estimated that 80% of marine debris comes from land-based sources. Ø The majority of marine debris is comprised of plastic materials. It is estimated that 60–80% of all marine debris, and 90% of floating debris is plastic. Ø Plastic is so durable that it can take hundreds of years to break down at sea, and some types never truly biodegrade at sea. Ø Today there is a 10 million square mile vortex of garbage, twice the size of Texas, in the Pacific Ocean known as the North Pacific Gyre. Densities of bits of plastic trash in this area have tripled during the last decade; recent estimates are that the densities have increased as much as five times in parts of the ocean. Ø In some parts of the North Pacific, there is six times as much plastic by mass as there is plankton. Ø More than 1 million seabirds, 100,000 marine mammals, and countless fish - some of which are threatened or endangered species under California or federal law - are killed annually from ingesting or becoming entangled in marine debris. Over 267 species worldwide have been impacted by plastic litter. Ø Plastic Marine Debris is expensive for us: California taxpayers spend \$25 million to collect and landfill plastic bag waste each year. **The Solution** Ø In February 2007, the Ocean Protection Council adopted a resolution put forth by Lt. Governor Garamendi on Reducing and Preventing Marine Debris. That resolution, which outlined 13 priority recommendations, was a major step forward for California in recognizing the significant impact that marine debris has on our health, our economy and our environment. Ø Subsequent to the passage of the Resolution, LGG worked with environmental organizations and other advocacy groups to form the The Pacific Protection Initiative, a flotilla of California state legislation aimed at addressing marine debris. Ø The Marine Debris Implementation Strategy to be released by the Ocean Protection Council is the next step in laying down a vision for attacking this critical threat to our coastal ecosystem. Ø I am very encouraged by the reports recommendations. The priority recommendations include: (1) Expand Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging waste (ie: battery buy-back); (2) Product bans on products such as single-use plastic grocery bags and polystyrene food containers; and (3) Assess selected litter fees that in turn fund education and enforcement of marine debris cleanup and abatement. Ø I am convening a think tank of legislators to meet with me to discuss the best kinds of legislative approaches to implement the state policy in the report. There is much we can do. · I will hold meetings with key stakeholders and work closely with legislators to develop legislation that implement the strategy mapped out by the Ocean Protection Council. · I will continue to push legislation crafted last year as part of the Pacific Protection Initiative · We will identify types of packaging waste to target for take-back programs, take-back program structure, and potential funding mechanisms to assist the state in the transition to this type of program. (Producer take-back of packaging has been implemented in 33 countries around the world. Most have stopped or significantly slowed the increase in packaging waste generation.) · Identify and develop education programs · I will also work with stakeholders to identify appropriate prohibitions of the most toxic and pervasive kinds of beach and ocean litter. ###